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SUBJECT: ANNUAL OSAC CRIME/SAFETY REPORT FOR MADAGASCAR AND THE
COMOROS

REF: STATE 132056

1. OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY SITUATION:

1A. Crime in Madagascar is consistent with the rates in other developing countries in the world. In 2008, Antananarivo saw its violent crime rate increase for the second consecutive year. Criminal elements in Antananarivo and throughout Madagascar are utilizing more confrontational tactics (threat of force or use of a weapon) when targeting victims, and are also committing more crimes in areas that are considered to be "safe" - those that are generally well lit and well traveled by pedestrians and vehicles. The U.S. Embassy has seen a noticeable increase in crime, sometimes violent, against tourists in the coastal cities frequented by tourists.

1B. In 2008, the U.S. Embassy has continued to receive weekly reports of increased criminal activity in the Malagasy community and from expats living in Antananarivo who were targeted by armed criminal elements. This year also saw increased media coverage documenting the increase levels of violent crime. During instances of home invasion robberies, the criminals often know the occupants of the residence or have intelligence indicating an increased amount of assets are being held in the residence and confront the occupants of the residence with armed force. Many of these criminal gangs are comprised of former felons, or ex-military and police units from the former regime and possess weapons such as AK-47 assault rifles and pistols stolen from military armories during the political crisis of 2001/2002.

1C. During the last six months of 2008, the U.S. Embassy received several reports of incidents involving night time criminal activity targeting vehicles driving outside of Antananarivo. These incidents involved rural villages designing a "trap" of sand, a tree log or some other substance or condition that makes the only viable road impassible. Local villagers then "assist" the stranded vehicle and expect monetary compensation. Other incidents have involved armed criminals who stage a "breakdown" that blocks the roadway, forcing the victimized driver to slow down, and hence become vulnerable. One incident occurred near Antananarivo's international airport where a group of armed attackers blocked the road and unsuccessfully attempted an armed robbery against a foreign national resident.

1D. However, the vast majority of crime that does occur in Antananarivo is petty street crime. Thieves use stealth and surprise to commit crimes of opportunity such as pick pocketing and "grab and run". Petty street crime occurs during all times of the day in the city. After dark, all Americans should avoid walking in the city or departing from bars and night clubs on foot, even in groups. Numerous attacks against foreigners, even against those departing as a group, have occurred late at night after departing a night club.

1E. Americans visiting Madagascar should not expect to experience any

hostility or aggression because of their citizenship. In fact, with the current government, the atmosphere for Americans is welcoming and receptive. There are no visible signs of anti-Americanism displayed by the press or the government of Madagascar. Americans who visit Madagascar are encouraged to register with the Consular Section located at the Embassy and to check with the most recent consular information sheet on Madagascar located at <http://travel.state.gov>.

COMOROS

¶E. The U.S. Government has no permanent presence in the Comoros. For American Citizens Services (AMCIT) the Consular Officer can be contacted at the American Embassy in Antananarivo at 261 (20) 22 212 157. American citizens who visit Comoros are encouraged to register with the Consular section in Antananarivo. Registration can be done online at <http://travel.state.gov> and travelers can also review the Consular information sheet on the Comoros.

¶F. Since gaining independence in 1975, Comoros has experienced 20 coups or attempted coups. Over the past few years, Comoros has experienced frequent strikes and civil unrest, which at times resulted in violent clashes between demonstrators and security forces. The most recent unrest involved the de facto separation of Anjouan from the Union government. In March 2008, Union forces re-took Anjouan and later held successful island elections. At the time of this writing, the nation is at relative peace but conditions are subject to rapid change on each of the three islands of Comoros due to weak political institutions and economic development. U.S citizens should avoid political rallies and street demonstrations due to the potential risk of confrontation and violence.

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¶G. Within the islands of Grand Comore, Moheli, and Anjouan, criminal activity is frowned upon within the Comoran culture. Criminal acts against foreigners are extremely rare and the Regional Security Officer (RSO) considers the Comoros to be an extremely safe community. However, if you are a victim of a crime you are advised not to resist, to remain calm, and to report the incident as soon as possible to the Consular Officer at telephone number 22-212-57 or the RSO at cell number phone: (261) 33-11-753-69.

¶2. POLITICAL VIOLENCE:

¶A. Putting aside its history of political instability, over the past few years Madagascar has completed multiple successful rounds of nationwide elections without any violence or large scale protests. All elections were viewed by the international community to be largely free and fair. At present, very little political violence or unrest exists in Madagascar. The political process, with some constraints allows for dissent and opposing views, appears to be stable. Although protests and demonstrations do occur frequently, they tend to be peaceful, with minimal effect on the security of citizens and visitors. However, the U.S. Embassy recommends that all Americans should avoid political gatherings and street demonstrations. In the past, there have been instances of violence during demonstrations but these outbursts were not directed against Americans. Certain large gatherings such as concerts or scenes of an accident also may pose a threat to bystanders.

¶B. Due to the ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the continued threat of terrorist attacks targeting western personnel and institutions, and the past terrorist attacks in the United States, Americans overseas are encouraged to remain vigilant to their surroundings and to exercise caution. Americans should avoid large crowds and gatherings, keep a low profile, and vary routes and times of all routine travel.

¶3. POST-SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

¶A. Crimes of opportunity are the most common type of incidents the local police deal with in Madagascar. Street crime and other forms of petty crime exist in most countries with high poverty levels, and Madagascar is no exception. Thefts from unlocked and locked vehicles, pick pocketing, and similar crimes are the most frequently reported incidents involving westerners. American citizens as well as other foreign visitors routinely report crime to their Embassies in Antananarivo. Nearly all foreigners stand out among the local population and, in so doing, are readily identifiable as potential targets of opportunity who carry in their possession more money, jewelry, and electronics than the average or even well off Malagasy could possess. Therefore, street crime is the biggest threat to American visitors coming to Madagascar.

¶B. Madagascar is a nation prone to seasonal cyclones (hurricanes), which can do substantial damage, particularly in the coastal areas. Typically, the cyclone season starts in early December and can last until mid April. In 2008, Madagascar was struck by four cyclones. Specifically, Cyclone Ivan hit the popular tourist destination of Isle Sainte Marie, off the northeastern coast of Madagascar, destroying 90% of the tourist destination's infrastructure. In 2007, Madagascar was effected by seven cyclones causing massive flooding in the coastal areas and destroying numerous homes, roads and bridges.

¶4. POLICE RESPONSE:

¶A. Two organizations are charged with maintaining peace and security in Madagascar, and are responsible for upholding its laws. The primary organization responsible for areas of Madagascar outside of the major cities is the Gendarmerie. The organization responsible for Antananarivo and other cities in Madagascar is the National Police. The U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo maintains excellent relations with both organizations.

¶B. Because Madagascar is a developing country, with the majority of the population living in extreme poverty, resources available to the local police services are extremely limited. The police are unable to respond to alarm calls or emergency calls in a reasonable time and sometimes take up to 45 minutes or longer to respond due to a number of factors. When emergency telephone calls are initiated by residents in Antananarivo, frequently the police telephones will go

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unanswered or the caller may receive a busy tone. Secondly, if an emergency call is answered, the police will usually have to meet a resident of the household at a recognizable landmark as there are no road signs in the neighborhood to help guide the responding police unit to the residence requesting assistance. This action increases the response time to an emergency call. Also the police do not have a computerized emergency call system which can locate the residence of a call for police services. In addition, another issue hampering police response is the credibility of the caller requesting services. The police must judge the credibility of the caller in order to determine if potential criminal elements are trying to send the police units off in the opposite direction before a criminal raid on a residence or business begins. Normally, a district police office in Antananarivo will have only one or two police cars available and functioning for any type of intervention operation.

¶C. In Madagascar, Military/Police roadblocks are common. At the first sight of a roadblock, travelers should be at a high state of alert and proceed with caution when approaching a roadblock. At these roadblocks, it is recommended that the traveler slow down (to a crawl) and be prepared to show identification. If the driver or any passengers of the vehicle are talking on a mobile telephone, they should immediately terminate the call and begin following the directions of the security forces controlling the roadblock. If the police/military personnel indicate that they want you to stop, then do so. Keep your windows rolled up, but show your identification. If you find yourself the recipient of excessive attention, detention, or harassment, to include the payment of impromptu "tolls", contact the Embassy as soon as possible.

¶D. During an emergency, visitors to Antananarivo can contact local police at telephone numbers 117 and 22-227-35. Visitors can also contact the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo, at telephone number 22-212-57 if assistance is needed in communicating with law enforcement officials.

¶5. MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:

¶A. In case of a medical emergency, perform first aid and take the patient directly to the Polyclinique D'Ilafy located in Antananarivo 22-425-66/69. Ambulance service in Antananarivo can be obtained through Espace Medical/Ambulance at 22-625-66, 22-219-72, or 032-02-088-16 or Polyclinique D'Ilafy at 22-425-66/69 or 033-11-458-48. The Embassy recommends that all visitors have medical evacuation insurance before arrival in Madagascar. Several air ambulance companies operate out of Antananarivo. A list can be provided by contacting the Embassy receptionist at 22-212-57. The receptionist can also provide a list of doctors, dentists, hospitals, pharmacies, and veterinarians.

¶6. TIPS ON HOW TO AVOID BECOMING A VICTIM OF CRIME:

¶A. The Embassy Security Office recommends that visitors to Madagascar take the following safety/security precautions during their travels in Madagascar:

-Be aware of your surroundings, especially in crowded streets. If you feel you have been targeted for criminal assault, move into the nearest safe haven, i.e. police station, restaurant, hotel, etc.

-Carry only a minimum of valuables. If possible, leave your valuables in a hotel safe, deposit box or similar secure container. If high value jewelry must be carried, store them in concealed or protected containers during your transit period.

-When driving or riding in a vehicle, always lock the doors and keep the windows rolled up in order to avoid "snatch and run" crimes.

-Be cautious when purchasing from street vendors. Certain items such as Aepyornis (a large extinct bird) eggs, gemstones, and gold are controlled exports and can create problems upon your departure. Street vendors frequently attempt to sell gemstones that are nothing more than broken colored glass to unsuspecting tourists.

-If establishing a business or residential presence, consider employing a private security service. The Embassy Security Office recommends against residents having a gardener fill the role of a residential watchman. Residential break-ins frequently occur during night time hours. Private security services have at their disposal rapid response react teams to respond to emergency calls. There are several reputable security firms in Antananarivo. Recommendations can be obtained from the Embassy security office.

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¶B. Because of Madagascar's poor infrastructure, sub-standard road maintenance and lighting, inadequate communications, and lack of repair facilities, travelers venturing outside Antananarivo should adhere to the following:

-Use a reputable guide or tour company to assist in your travel.

-Provide an itinerary and route of travel (i.e., time/date/place of arrival) to a trusted associate or representative.

-Travel with some type of two-way communication device such as a cellular or satellite telephone.

-Travel only during daylight hours. The U.S. Embassy strongly recommends avoiding night time travel outside urban areas due to poor road conditions, non-existent emergency response resources, and criminal elements that target night time travelers.

-Bring sufficient funds, spare parts, etc. to take care of emergency situations.

-If possible, travel with other vehicles and/or travelers.

¶7. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

¶A. The Consular Section urges all visitors to register with the Embassy upon arrival or before the trip at travelregistration.state.gov. The Embassy is located in downtown Antananarivo at 14-16 rue Rainitovo, Antsahavola, BP 620, telephone 261-20-22-212-57 or 22-207-18. The Consular Section, Commercial Officer, and Regional Security Officer (RSO) are all located at the Embassy and can be reached at the above numbers. The web site for the U.S. Embassy in Madagascar is: www.antenanarivo.usembassy.gov

¶B. An Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) does exist in Madagascar. OSAC is designed to assist the American private sector with its security and information needs overseas. The Regional Security Officer is available to meet with representatives of U.S. businesses visiting Madagascar to answer questions about security.

¶8. OSAC COUNTRY COUNCIL:

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